



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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in which the youngest children in boys' schools are entrusted to the youngest teachers, in spite of the known fact that the young and backward pupils need very special attention. One writer says that they are the most difficult of all human material to handle. Now I insist upon the fact that women, by reason of their very sex, are better able to deal with the very young. They have not only more experience, but they are far more in touch with children than any man. They have what for want of a better word I may call intellectual sympathy. They never lose sight of the child itself and become absorbed in the matter taught, as men are liable to be. Much of the loathing for books and consequent idleness of boys has been implanted by his first male teachers, who even if not actually hard and brutal (as they certainly were in my time) are obtuse as to the difficulties of the young boy and intolerant of the difficulty which most children have in fixing their attention on subjects which don't interest them. The necessity of women teachers for the little boys is greater than the need of male teachers for the higher branches for girls, and yet in most girls' schools the value of men for certain subjects has never been doubted. Do let us throughout life allow the sexes to influence each other, allowing no interregnum, very especially not during that time when influence tells the most.

The return to what is after all the natural life is the remedy of the idleness of the schoolboy, and consequent want of interest in the man, the guard against ill-assorted unions, the cure demanded for perversion of feeling which leads to so much ill, the river Jordan in which the youthful Naaman may wash and be clean and grow up to be physically, morally, and intellectually a valuable member of society, a wise progenitor, aiding the future as well as the present.

[Discussion is invited.—ED.]

THE TEACHING OF ART.*

BY MARION THOMSON.

PERHAPS there is no expression which has become so meaningless by misuse as the term Art or Artistic. The meaning we wish it to convey when we speak of it in the school course is such a thorough training to the eye as will develop its utmost powers of observation and appreciation of beauty, and such a training to the hand as will enable it to give the best possible expression of that observation and appreciation.

The importance of drawing as a necessary subject in the ordinary time table is now generally acknowledged, and the time allowed for this and for other hand-work grows longer every year. The special faculties affected are observation, memory, judgment, and the senses of proportion and of colour, besides a valuable deftness and quickness of touch. If we allow these claims to the teaching of a subject, our next step is to consider how best we can undertake it and what methods we shall use. I have taught drawing now for many years and I have never ceased to congratulate myself on my chosen subject. It is one which all children are fond of—and this is of course a great help to the teacher—and if she brings to her work a great enthusiasm for her subject, a great love for her pupils and sufficient technical knowledge, she will find enough pleasure in her work and encouragement in the results to carry her through difficulties, fatigue and occasional disappointment. I put love of work and pupils before system, because, though this is necessary, a teacher thoroughly trained in a system will be a failure if she lacks sympathy, before the teacher whose sympathy gives her insight into the difficulties of her pupils, and who is able to provide special work for special individual cases. Personally, I consider a thorough technical training in the various branches of art better than any so-called system, which may be excellent for the originator, who has no scruple in breaking

* Lecture given to Belgravia Branch of P.N.E.U.

away from it when occasion demands, but which is apt to become narrowing to those who put too much faith in it.

Before giving my experiences as to what I myself find useful and the best way of obtaining certain results, I should like it to be understood that I do not lay claim to any special system, but simply put those experiences before you in case they may contain suggestions that may be useful also to you. In talking over this subject with parents and teachers and with the heads of schools, the great difficulty always appears to be how to allow time enough to give proper attention to drawing and hand-work. There is so much to be got into the day of a child, and drawing has been considered a fancy subject so long that it is still liable to be pushed outside altogether, especially if the child has no taste for it. When a child has apparently "no taste" for hand-work, and is awkward with its fingers, then it is that it needs the hand training far more than a child who has a natural facility. This sounds almost too obvious, but it is a fact that parents still ask that a child may have special lessons in arithmetic or Latin instead of drawing, etc., "as he has no taste for it." If, however, we acknowledge the power of hand-work in the cultivation of special faculties, we must rather consider what subjects we can take out of the present time table in order to give it its proper place. In most schools this has now been done, and in addition every possible lesson is illustrated by blackboard drawing, by wall pictures, by modelling, and by the children themselves in their exercise books.

For little children I consider modelling and brush-work the best introduction to art teaching, but before they are old enough to have actual lessons they have received impressions of colour or form, good or bad, according to the furniture of their nursery and the colour and style of the dresses worn by the mother and nurses. There are special pictures sold now for the decoration of nursery walls, which are excellent hung on plain walls, preferably green, and changed occasionally. Some nurseries have blackboards fixed to the walls, so that when the scribbling age begins it can be indulged in to the heart's delight. The headmaster of an important School of Art tells us that his father had the nursery walls distempered in a plain colour and on this the children drew with brushes

dipped in water, pictures which left no trace when dry, but lasted long enough to please the children. A moveable blackboard can of course be provided, or failing this, sheets of rough brown paper and plenty of coloured chalk, and with an occasional suggestion from a clever nurse, the child's "Art Education" is already begun.

Modelling in clay is far easier for little children than drawing with a point. When we draw in outline we do not draw what we see but only a part, or rather one effect of what we see; and this needs training, which means time. Children will give you a better drawing from memory in outline than they will from the actual object. But a copy of a simple natural object in clay is comparatively easy to them, and modelling has the great advantage of using both hands at once. Clay is far better than plasticine for expressing nature; it is more easily washed off the hands and brushed from the clothes; also it has the power of hardening so that models can be taken home and shown to the parents, and I consider this an important part in the relation between the parent and the child's school life. The best objects for copying in clay are fruit leaves, birds' nests, etc. I do not think it is wise to attempt to model in clay those subjects connected with the kindergarten lesson, which are quite unsuitable to the material. As the children grow older really beautiful models of nature in low relief are made and later still copies from casts of hands, feet, etc., etc., and of heads in relief, till the girl or boy who has found in this medium the power of expression he or she wants, is delighting in modelled design or portraiture, and others have found their fingers endowed with a quickness and delicacy of tremendous help to them, unconscious though they may be of its source.

Brush-work has excited a great amount of controversy and has many enemies, and there is small wonder in this when one sees the text-books that are published and even exhibited at the stalls of well-known publishers on special occasions. They teach certain ingenious ways of placing a brush filled with colour in different positions on paper and appear to call the result after any flower or leaf that happens to come into their heads at the time. What we mean, however, by brush-work is simply what the Japanese mean by drawing—

that is, we use a brush filled with colour instead of a pencil point. The difference is that where they use an outline sometimes or often, we use only a mass of colour in teaching little children, but we do not forbid ourselves the brush outline if we wish to use it. I have been discouraged sometimes, and my classes have been discouraged too, in seeing the beautiful brush drawing done by Japanese children, but we have to remember that the Japanese use the brush for their writing as well as their drawing, and our children are taught to write with the fingers closed round a point so that the sweep of the stroke is confined to the radius of the fingers only, and the ideal of the drawing teacher is the free sweep from the shoulder.

Any teacher of drawing knows the difficulty of teaching a class of little boys of the average age of eight years, who have not learnt any drawing before and whose idea of a line is one made with the fingers held close and firmly down towards the point of a pencil. This has to be *unlearnt* before anything else is done, and I have found brush-work an excellent corrective. The first copies are twigs from different trees, blades of grass and then berries, and so on to simple flowers. I am using also good Japanese studies as occasional copies, and I am delighted to find how greatly the sense of colour is developed and how great a difference there is in this between children who come to me at eleven or twelve years old who have had no teaching in this subject, and those who have had it from their babyhood. I can remember my own comparatively late development in the sense of colour, trained as I was on the old lines—that is, outline from a free-hand copy and strict prohibition against the use of colour until a certain amount of time had been spent in pencil and chalk work. Needless to say the paint box was used out of class, but without direction of any kind.

Another thing that has pleased me is the knowledge of form that comes through the study of brush-work, that is, the expressed desire to give the colours of the shadows and to draw as well the outline in pencil, which means that instead of the teacher wanting the children to draw what time has enabled her to see, they want to express what their own observation has enabled them to see for themselves. Brush-work, as the teacher of drawing understands it, is not a subject

to supersede drawing proper, but only a help to the understanding of colour and form, and at the age of eleven or twelve is naturally merged into the general study of outline, light-and-shade and colour.

Drawing.—At least an hour a week should be allowed for the drawing lesson as well as the half-hour or three-quarters allowed for modelling and brush-work respectively. Hand-work lessons should really be sandwiched in between all other lessons, and instead of the children being backward in this or that subject, in the end parents will find their children's grasp of each subject far clearer and the result more lasting; for we get an all-round development instead of an over-development of one part of the body and a consequent weakness and liability to break down.

In this connection there has been much discussion about ambidexter drawing, which is taught in many schools. I do not feel I know enough about this subject to venture an opinion on its merits. If its object is physical development or provision for emergency, and if these can be best taught by drawing, I think it should have a place in the school curriculum, but I do not think it should take the place of the ordinary drawing course, of which the first object is training for the eye; nor can it be properly taught by a few minutes' practice on a blackboard at the end of the ordinary lesson. I would emphasise again the use of both hands in modelling, and we naturally use both equally in many domestic duties, as also in many of our games and amusements. One disadvantage in the use of the left hand in writing is that our character is written from left to right, an outward movement from the chest; to write this character with the left hand means a movement which contracts the chest. Blackboard practice, drawing from the shoulder and standing well away from the board, is excellent, and a great help to the teacher towards the end of a lesson when the little ones are getting tired of sitting in one position, but it is difficult to manage with a large class. I have found it possible to use the last quarter of an hour in this way in a large class of little boys, letting one draw at a time, and as it is considered a great treat discipline can be kept by choosing the most orderly first.

I am using brown paper, charcoal and white chalk for

model drawing up to the ages of nine or ten; also working with the brush full of colour without outline for round objects, such as vases, jugs, basins, etc. Pencil work for these ages is kept for drawing from flowers and leaves and for making patterns, sometimes for square tiles, etc., afterwards to be coloured in flat washes.

The use of squared paper I believe to be a great mistake; it is most trying to the eyes, and the lines spoil the effect of the drawing when it is finished. The result may appear more correct and more like the copy, but the teacher has to remember and to impress on the children that what they learn in doing a thing is what matters. A child often asks why it isn't better to rule a line than to draw it, since it looks better. The answer to this is why not have a musical box to play your scales. What we aim at is the best individual expression of individual ideas, and this is not obtained by mechanical means.

The less a teacher touches a pupil's actual drawing the better; corrections can be made on the blackboard or on separate sheets of paper. It is most discouraging to a child, and all but the lazy ones feel it, to have its drawing almost all rubbed out and new lines of the teacher's own put in; also I consider it most important that children should take their work home for the parents to see. It is most unsatisfactory for a teacher to be asked by a parent, incredulously perhaps, if the child did the work herself. A diffident child will often say the teacher did it nearly all, on being praised, or another will take the whole credit quietly to itself. The only way out of this is to show only untouched work, and I have found this rule a great spur to individual effort on the part of the child.

It is a great help to teachers and children, especially when lessons are at home, to see work obtained by other teachers and done by other children, and I think it would be an excellent thing if some sort of club could be formed amongst parents and private governesses where this could be done. Students coming full of enthusiasm from their training are often disheartened by the apparently low standard of work done by their pupils, and only comparison with other teachers and other children can show them how much or how little they can expect.

Since we have been taught to go to nature for our copies for our drawing classes, we have a much wider field than when copies of outline ornament were provided for us as alone legitimate, but I still believe in an occasional lesson for style and method in copying a good reproduction in plaster or outline or photography of works by old and modern masters. I do *not* believe in the artistic value of an enlargement to distortion of a delicate natural object, such as a butterfly, enlarged to a foot square and placed in front of a class.

If we want to draw from nature do not let us draw from copies (?) made for schools. Every child should be provided with her own plant or flower, and the delicate construction must be pointed out and insisted upon in the drawing. In this connection I may mention the beautiful butterflies which may be bought in Regent Street, so mounted that they serve as exquisite copies for drawing and painting, and no amount of use will injure them.

Drawing out of doors is very important and there are always simple objects—gates, chimneys, etc., which quite young children can draw, and the drawing out of doors in summer-time means learning many things besides the actual pencil work.

The teacher of drawing has so much material out of which to make her lessons that the difficulty is what to leave out, but she must keep in mind the qualities she wants to develop and consider how she can best train memory, observation, accuracy, design, proportion, and taste in colour, etc.

Many different ways of drawing from memory will occur to the teacher. Accuracy and observation are, I consider, best taught by careful outline drawing from nature. Proportion by modelling, and light-and-shade and colour sense by brush-work, as a beginning to ordinary colour study, but each of these qualities is contained to a certain extent in each branch of art teaching; and an important result for many boys and girls, in addition, is the possession of a hobby which will be of incalculable and growing value through their lives, and prevent the thirst for other means of passing the time which waste instead of fulfilling life's possibilities.